Literature searching using the Cochrane Library

A Keyll Darree Library Guide

What is Cochrane?

The Cochrane Library is available at www.cochranelibrary.com. Cochrane is the best single source of reliable clinical evidence. It will help you find reliable evidence about the effects of health care treatments. If you find a systematic review that answers your question, you will be saved the work of searching databases for journal literature, as well as all the reading involved. So it’s worth looking at Cochrane first!

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Databases

The Cochrane Library consists of several databases:

- **Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews** – A systematic review identifies an intervention for a specific disease or other problem in health care, and determines whether or not this intervention works. To do this authors locate, appraise and synthesise evidence from as many relevant scientific studies as possible. They summarise conclusions about effectiveness, and provide a unique collation of the known evidence on a given topic, so that others can easily review the primary studies for any intervention. Systematic reviews differ from other types of review in that they adhere to a strict design in order to make them more comprehensive, thus minimising the chance of bias, and ensuring their reliability. Reviews are of two types: full reviews and protocols. Protocols provide an outline and proposed approach of the systematic review.

- **Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)** – this database includes details of published trials taken from bibliographic databases and other published resources. CENTRAL includes the title of the article, information on where it was published and, in many cases, the abstract.

- **Cochrane Clinical Answers (CCAs)** - CCAs provide a readable, digestible, clinically-focused entry point to rigorous research from Cochrane Reviews. They are designed to be actionable and to inform point-of-care decision-making. Each CCA contains a clinical question, a short answer, and data for the outcomes from the Cochrane Review deemed most relevant to practising healthcare professionals, our target audience.

All the databases have their value, but the systematic reviews are especially useful for most people. When you search or browse, you search across all the databases at once.

Searching for information

You can either browse or search to find relevant material in the Cochrane Library. Browsing is easy and gives you the opportunity to identify other areas that may be of interest.
Click on the relevant subject area and it will bring up results relating to the topic and options to filter or search in reviews, protocols, trials etc.

You can also browse the Cochrane review group to get a feel of subject areas covered.

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Simple search

Use the search box at the top right of the screen. Enter “free-text” terms (i.e. words that you think of) and click on the magnifying glass. e.g. diabetes and adult

This will then bring up a list of search results relating to the chosen key words. The Cochrane Reviews will come up first and you can select to review results in other databases such as Protocols and Trials.

The left hand side gives you the option to filter further by date, status, language, type and topics.

Browse the results and click on the title to see the full-text. This is how your record will look. Click on view PDF and select full to retrieve the complete review.

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Below is the opening page of a review. Notice the size of the review – this one is 491 pages long! Always check before printing!

All reviews have the same style content. Notice the plain language summary – written with a straightforward approach.

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Advanced search

Selecting the advanced search button allows you to undertake a more detailed or complex search. This search form gives you more flexibility in formulating your search. You can use the drop-down menus to limit your search terms to different fields eg. The title

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Using the Search Manager enables you to create and save complex multi-line searches. You can insert lines by clicking on the + button:

Type in multiple searches and combine using your Boolean logic **and** or **not**. With Cochrane you have to type in the **# no** to combine.

**Note:** Search strategies can be saved but you will need to register and then sign into the Cochrane Library.
When viewing results pay particular attention to what they actually are: e.g. Cochrane review, other reviews, trials etc. Search Manager allows you to build up a search history:

Mesh Search

For experienced users, the MeSH browser offers various features to allow users to customize their search and to add MeSH searches to Search Manager to create complex searches.

Searching MeSH index terms is the most comprehensive way of finding relevant items. MeSH stands for Medical Subject Headings. It is a thesaurus of index terms and allows you to search for articles that are indexed with your term and therefore very relevant.

To do a MeSH Search, click the link on the advanced search page and then Medical Terms (MeSH).
A search box will appear. Enter a term that you want to look up and click **Look Up**.

![Search Box](https://example.com/search-box.png)

A tree structure will appear as above. This shows the term you entered within its indexing hierarchy. Click view results.

You can see by the hierarchical structure that it is one of the **Skin Diseases, Papulosquamous**. Psoriasis itself has a narrower term: Arthritis, Psoriatic. Because the most specific index term possible is always assigned, an article about psoriatic arthritis will be indexed with the term Arthritis, Psoriatic and **NOT** Psoriasis. For this reason, you should always include the narrower terms in your search, if there are any by selecting **Explode all trees**:

![Tree Structure](https://example.com/tree-structure.png)
If you type a word into the MeSH and there is not a MeSH term that matches it you will get suggestions as below:

Persevere and scroll down the suggested list. Sometimes your topic will appear further down the list phrased slightly differently.

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Saving records

Once you have done a search on selected topics, select the result(s) you wish to save by ticking the box(es) on the left. Then click on **Export Selected citation(s)**.

This will then give you the option to save the citation to reference management software (you can save it to Refworks) or download.

Remember, if you want to save searches, you will need to be logged into Cochrane Library.

**Search Tips**

- If you want to search a phrase, you must enter it with quotes, e.g. "colon cancer", otherwise the words will be searched as colon AND cancer, which will give many irrelevant results.
- Plurals are automatically searched, so searching *child* will also find *children*.
- You can truncate terms by using *, e.g. *depress* will find depression, depressive, depressed, etc. You can truncate at either end of a word or in the middle, e.g. *depress* also finds antidepressants.

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• Some alternative spellings are automatically searched (e.g. tumor/tumour), but to be certain of catching them, use internal truncation, e.g. isch*mic to find ischaemic or ischemic.
• Use brackets to control the order in which the search executes, if you are using a combination of AND and OR, e.g. magnesium AND (eclampsia OR perinatal asphyxia).
• NEAR can be used instead of AND to narrow your search. e.g. smoking NEAR pregnancy will find the two words within 6 words of each other in either order, so it is more specific than using AND. NEAR/n will find the words within n words of each other in either order, e.g. NEAR/4.

Click on search help box for further tips and advice on how to get the most from searching the Cochrane Library.

If you have registered with Cochrane on the home page you will be allowed to save your searches to retrieve at a later stage. Once you have saved and named a search, it is listed within your My Profile area. You can choose to re-run the search at any time, or use the search to set an e-mail alert profile so that you will be notified as soon as an article matching the search is published online.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, and if you have any further questions then please get in touch with us at librarykeylldarree@gov.im or on 642993.

We’d also love your feedback on this training, please spare 2 minutes to fill out our Online Training Feedback Survey.

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